UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

In Reply, Please Refer to File No.

Memphis, Tennessee
December 5, 1977

JAMES EARL RAY;
Dr. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. - VICTIM;
CIVIL RIGHTS - CONSPIRACY

On November 21, 1977, retired Special Agent Joe C. Hester appeared at Washington, D. C., at the request of the House Committee on Assassinations.

Mr. Hester met with the Committee staff in their offices at Washington, D. C., and was interviewed for a total of four hours by two different groups of five persons each. Both groups were affable and were not in any way critical of the investigation conducted in this case.

[redacted] (e) b1

The second group of five interviewers asked more general questions regarding the Bureau's investigation of the King murder. They seemed to be greatly concerned with the allegation of conspiracy. Mr. Hester advised them that he believed the conspiracy theory was an invention by the Department of Justice to be used to justify the FBI's investigation of Dr. King's murder. Mr. Hester advised them that he had never personally believed there was a conspiracy and he did not believe that any of his FBI superiors had ever believed in the conspiracy theory. Mr. Hester further advised that it was his personal opinion that James Earl Ray, acting alone, had murdered Dr. King and that his subsequent travels were probably financed by armed robbery.

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This group was concerned with how the subject Ray had known how to obtain false documents following his arrival in Canada. Mr. Hester pointed out that a "Top Ten" criminal had been arrested in Canada and had been returned to the Missouri State Penitentiary and had served time there with James Earl Ray prior to Ray's escape. Mr. Hester indicated it was his belief that this "Top Ten" fugitive had been responsible for instructing Ray on how to proceed in obtaining false documents in Canada.

This group touched on such diverse elements as the information furnished by John McFerren regarding Frank Liberto, and one of the interviewers agreed that they had not believed McFerren to be a very reliable witness. They also discussed Ray's purchase of the rifle in Birmingham; the fact that Officer Redditt was moved from the firehouse near the Lorraine Motel just prior to the murder; what motive did Ray have for killing Dr. King; whether or not there was any evidence to indicate a conspiracy; whether or not there were any wiretaps and whether or not there had been any surreptitious entries made against King and his followers at Memphis prior to the assassination; and when, following his escape, did Ray appear to have made up his mind to assassinate Dr. King.

In addition, they asked numerous questions about the political climate in Memphis just prior to the assassination and inquired as to what investigation was being conducted by the FBI in regard to the Sanitation Workers Strike and the first march conducted by Dr. King. Mr. Hester was forced to admit that he had had nothing to do with the investigation of Dr. King prior to the murder and he suggested that they talk to current Special Agent [redacted] who would be in a position to furnish information in this regard. b7c

They inquired about the interview of James Earl Ray conducted by former Special Agent in Charge Robert G. Jensen, former Special Agent Robert F. Boyle, and Mr. Hester at the state prison in Nashville, Tennessee, following Ray's plea of guilty. Mr. Hester recounted as best he could recall the events that transpired in connection with this attempted interview and advised the interviewers that [redacted] b7c

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The Committee indicated that they might desire to interview Mr. Hester again, either personally or telephonically, and they were assured that he would be available and agreeable to assisting them in any way possible.